

Duxbury Clipper, Wednesday, August 6, 1997



Norman Smith, director of Trailside Museum and a volunteer with Mass. Audubon, holds a 5-week-old osprey for banding. Only 10 percent of ospreys born live to be 2 years old or more and breed. Ospreys migrate to South America in October, returning in March.

Six Osprey Chicks Thriving in Duxbury

Local Conservation Administrator Joe Grady has witnessed the birth of his own children over the past couple of years, but it's hard to imagine he could be more exuberant than he appears when he talks about the success of the town's parental role in raising young ospreys.

Along with Audubon, the town has overseen the return of osprey to the South Shore through construction of a number of nesting poles throughout town.

This year there were 16 successful hatchlings on the South Shore including Duxbury's 6.

Earlier this summer the young birds were banded by Audubon personnel including Terry Nickerson of Duxbury.

Both of the nests which produced young osprey this year were located north of the Powder Point Bridge, one on Scat Island and the other on a nesting pole in the marsh between the bridge and Route 139 in Marshfield. Each nest produced 3 chicks, Grady said. There were 7 successful nests on the South Shore this summer.

Osprey Chicks Born in Duxbury

Norman Smith felt lucky when he saw blood on his shirt after being attacked by an angry female Osprey in Scituate. While Smith was recently working to place an identification band on a three-week old Osprey chick, the protective mother spread her five-foot wings and dove for Smith's face. He ducked just in time to save his eyes, but not before the Osprey's talons dug into the left side of his head. "It hurt. It felt like somebody wound up and punched me," he said.

The attack was part of an otherwise pleasant annual task, Smith's once a year count and banding of Osprey chicks along the South Shore. The director of the Blue Hills Trailside Museum and 28 year Massachusetts Audubon Volunteer, along with Joe Grady, local conserva-

tion administrator, worked their way down from Weymouth to Duxbury, stopping in Hull, Scituate, and Marshfield, to band Osprey chicks.

This year, 10 new Osprey hatchlings have been reported on the South Shore, including three chicks discovered in Duxbury. Including the chicks, there are approximately 25 Ospreys living on the South Shore.

Duxbury has four Osprey nesting poles throughout the marshlands but only the two poles north of the Power Point Bridge house Osprey nests. Although different pairs of Osprey use both nests, chicks were only produced from the Scat Island nest, visible from the bridge.

Once on the Massachusetts Threatened List, Ospreys are

now flourishing throughout the state. In the 70's, Osprey numbers were seriously reduced as a result of DDT and other pesticide residues that ran into the ocean, were absorbed by fish, and eventually eaten by Ospreys. The DDT affected the Osprey's reproductive organs and made the shells of their eggs very weak. As a result, mother Ospreys would often break their eggs while trying to incubate them.

Massachusetts Audubon began the project to save the Ospreys 15 years ago. Since then, the town and the Audubon have worked closely to ensure the safe return of Osprey to the area through projects such as the annual banding and construction of nesting poles.

Although the Osprey population has not completely rebounded from the impact of the now-banned DDT pesticide, they can be found along much of the North American Atlantic Coastal region. Some Osprey can be found inland near lakes, but will always stay close to the water because they only eat fish.

Ospreys are normally peaceful birds and will not harm humans, but Smith was an exception to that rule. "I have worked with the Audubon for 28 years and have never heard of an Osprey attacking a person, that is, until I was attacked," Smith said. "I'll wear a helmet when I go back to that nest in Scituate."

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